

Parkinson's Disease:

What Every Caregiver Should Know

Understanding Parkinson's Disease

Parkinson's disease (PD) is a long-term, progressive brain disorder that affects movement. Signs and symptoms of PD usually occur slowly. As a caregiver, you will begin to notice changes in the patient's daily functioning. For example,

- **Shaking (tremors) and stiffness** can make dressing, cooking, eating, writing, and other activities difficult.
- **Slow movement and balance problems** can make it difficult to get from place to place.

As the disease worsens over time, symptoms may become more severe and difficult to manage. Other symptoms may include *confusion* or *hallucinations*, *depression*, *choking*, *slurred speech*, and *urinary problems*. Alert the patient's doctor to any changes in symptoms.



The Caregiver's Role in Daily Management

The goal of PD treatment is to manage symptoms so the patient can maintain daily activities. Although the patient and his/her doctor will make the decisions, you can provide physical and emotional support needed to manage PD.

Helping the Patient Take Medicine as Directed

- Ask the doctor for specific information about each medicine. Keep a list of each prescription or over-the-counter medicine, vitamin, or herbal supplement. Note how, when, and how much is taken.
- The patient may need to take multiple medicines. Help the patient organize medicines each week in a pill organizer.
- Be sure to keep medicines out of the reach of children.



Be sure the patient refills prescriptions on time

- Keep a record of each medicine, including how well it works and any side effects.
- Ask the doctor what to expect from the medicines as the disease worsens over time.

Helping the Patient Stay Active

- Encourage the patient to stay active with simple, enjoyable exercises, such as *walking* or *gardening*.
- If balance is a problem, ask the doctor about seated exercises for the patient.
- Ask the doctor about other activities or exercise programs, such as *yoga* or *massage therapy*.



Helping the Patient Eat Healthy

- Encourage a balanced diet rich in whole-grains, fruits, vegetables, and calcium.
- Ask the doctor if protein, such as meats, interferes with the PD medicines. If it does, find out when and how much protein should be eaten.
- Be sure to cut food into small pieces, and have the patient drink plenty of water during meals.
- Learn basic first aid techniques, such as the Heimlich or abdominal thrust maneuver, in case the patient falls or chokes.



High-fiber foods may help prevent constipation

Getting Additional Help for the Patient

Whenever possible, join the patient for doctor visits. Before the appointment, write down any questions or concerns you have. If you need additional help, ask the doctor for referrals to other specialists:

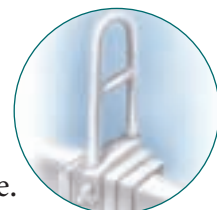
- A **physical therapist** (PT) can help design the right exercise program for the patient.
- An **occupational therapist** (OT) can teach you and the patient about techniques and aids for moving, bathing, eating, and dressing.
- A **speech therapist** can help if the patient has problems swallowing and/or speaking.
- A **dietitian** can suggest a healthy diet with foods that are easy to swallow and digest.



Adapting the Home Environment

You can help make daily activities easier and safer with some simple changes:

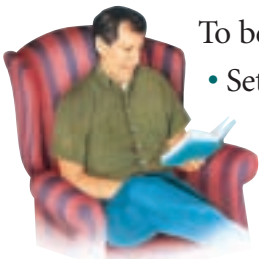
- Remove obstacles, such as throw rugs and small furniture, from the floors.
- Make sure there are comfortable, firm chairs with armrests.
- Consider whether the patient needs ramps to be installed in or around the house.
- Put rubber mats in the shower/tub and rubber-backed mats on the bathroom floor.
- Install handrails and grab bars, especially in the bathroom (shower or tub).
- Install a shower chair and spray hose in the shower to make bathing easier.
- Use a tub transfer bench if patient has a bathtub rather than a shower stall.
- Put a chair in the bathroom so the patient can sit while washing or fixing hair.
- Replace buttons on clothing with Velcro® fasteners, if necessary.
- Buy easy-to-wear clothing, like pants with elastic waists and shoes with Velcro®.
- Buy special cups and utensils (like angled utensils) to make dining easier.
- Place a night light in the bedroom and bathroom.
- Install a handrail on the bed to help patient get into and out of bed.



Taking Care of Yourself

To be a helpful caregiver, you must take care of yourself. Keep these tips in mind:

- Set realistic goals. Give the patient enough time for eating, dressing, bathing, and toileting.
- Take time for yourself. You cannot be a good caregiver if you are exhausted.
 - If you feel overwhelmed or stressed, this is common. Speak to your doctor and get help.
- Ask your doctor about a caregiver's support group in your area, or contact:
 - National Parkinson Foundation: Caregivers Forum: www.parkinson.org
 - National Alliance for Caregiving: www.caregiving.org
 - Family Caregiver Alliance: www.caregiver.org



Important Safety Information

Prescription REQUIP® XL™ (ropinirole extended-release tablets) is not for everyone. **REQUIP XL may cause you to fall asleep or feel very sleepy during normal activities such as driving;** or to faint or feel dizzy, nauseated, or sweaty when you stand up. Tell your doctor if you experience these or the following problems, or if you drink alcohol or are taking other medicines that make you drowsy. Side effects may include nausea, dizziness, drowsiness or sleepiness, headache, and sudden uncontrolled movements (dyskinesia). Increase or decrease in blood pressure and heart rate may occur. Hallucinations may occur at any time during treatment. Also tell your doctor if you experience new or increased gambling, sexual, or other intense urges while taking REQUIP XL. REQUIP XL may increase the side effects of L-dopa. Most patients were not bothered enough to stop taking REQUIP XL.